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NOTES ON THE CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

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THE
UNIVERSITY PRESS
CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge

Printed at the University Press

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The Pitt Building

THE long street, stretching under various names from the Trumpington entrance to the town as far as Bridge Street, in the Trumpington Street portion of which stands the University Press, was in former days contented with the single designation of High Street.

Further down the same street, near the present site of Caius College, stood in the early years of the 16th century a house, bearing the sign of the King's Arms, once the lodging of the world-famed Erasmus, where John Siberch, a printer from the Rhineland, known to the great scholar and

perhaps brought to England by his influence, set up a Press in 1520 for printing University matter. During two years some eight books are recorded as having been printed by him, among them a medical text-book, Linacre's translation of *Galen de Temperamentis*, claiming to be the first book printed in England containing Greek characters. The earliest specimen extant of his printing is the *Oratio* of Henry Bullock, composed of eight quarto leaves, the type Roman, without device or ornamentation of any kind. Nothing further seems to be known of this early printer, but certain of his books may be seen in the libraries of Trinity and St John's Colleges.

In 1529 proceedings were taken against one Sygar Nicholson of Gonville Hall, for harbouring heretical books, the burning of which cost the University a groat for faggots,

A Type Store Room

in addition to three shillings and fourpence for keeping Sygar in prison during proceedings against him. Nevertheless, in 1534, this Nicholson was appointed Printer with two others, the University having secured from Henry VIII Letters Patent to retain three resident printers or stationers to print and sell such books as might be licensed by the Vice-Chancellor or his assessors.

In spite of this accorded privilege, the Press was for some time curiously unproductive, there being no record of any book printed from the time of Siberch until 1584, a period of sixty years. So much was the Press during these years a dead letter in the promotion of the learning it existed to spread, that in 1524 the Hebrew lectures of Robert Wakefield before the University were printed in London by Wynkyn de Worde.

During these ineffectual years and for some time after, jealous attacks from the newly-incorporated Stationers' Company of London greatly hindered the working of the Press as a University agency.

Lord Burghley, writing in 1577 to the Vice-Chancellor and Heads in reference to their desire of protecting for the University the printing of Psalters, Prayer-books and sundry books in English, for which Queen Elizabeth had already granted special privileges to others, deprecates any attempt to prejudice the Queen's grants, but suggests that the University might employ an artificer for printing matters pertaining to the Schools, etc.

However in 1582, Thomas Thomas, a fellow of King's, was appointed Printer as an indication of the determination of the University to assert its legitimate

One of the Composing Rooms

independence. From the time of Thomas' appointment the office was filled regularly and without interruption.

Many of these earlier printers were graduates and holders of other offices in the University. That members of the University were found thus engaging in a business so closely connected with learning is not surprising, though they were probably not practical printers, but nominated as inspectors for the convenience of University business.

Thomas, a scholar and a hard-working man, did much for the advancement of the Press. His office stood opposite the west door of Great St Mary's, in the parish book of which Church it is set forth that "Mrs Thomas paid for the buriall of her husband 6/8." He died in 1588, as a result of over-arduous labour in compiling

a Latin dictionary. This Thomas was counted specially worthy by his confrères, for in the preface to a later edition of his dictionary, Legate, his successor, thus eulogises Thomas' attainments in comparison with those of his own contemporaries.

> "A famous Printer, yes something more than a printer such as we are now who understand the Latin that we print no more than Bellerophon the letters he carried and who sell in our shops nothing of our own except the paper black with the press's sweat."

In Thomas' first year of office, agents of the Stationers' Company, sanctioned by the Bishop of London, seized the Press, the plant and all printed sheets they could lay hands on, in consequence perhaps of a specially vigilant suppression of the Puritan

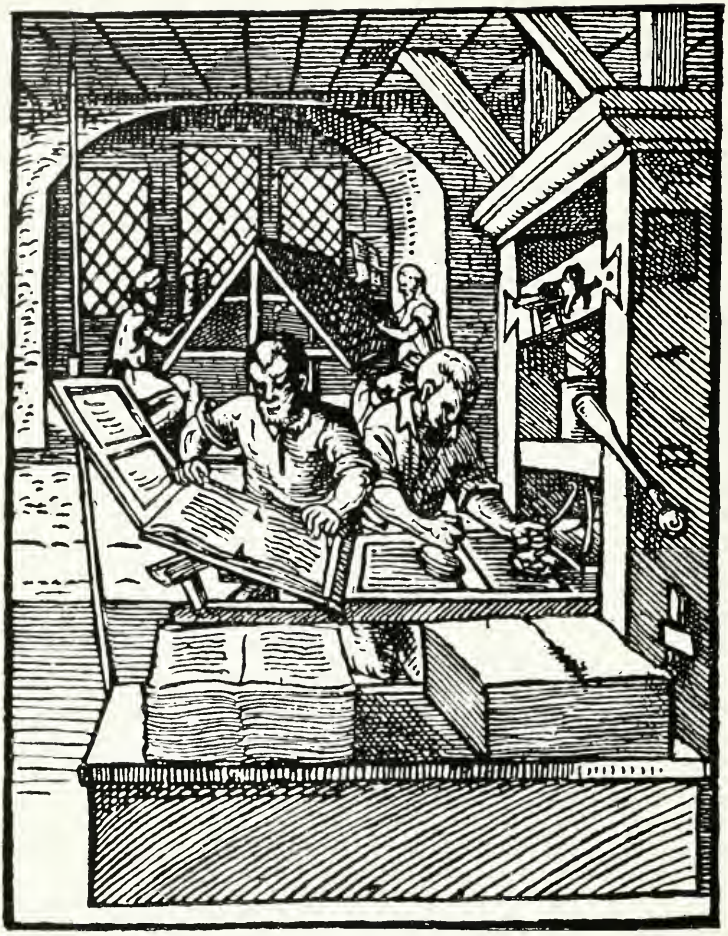
Press at the time, or more probably from jealousy. Notwithstanding this upheaval, a year or so later the charter of Henry VIII was confirmed after further petitions from the University, assuring Burghley that if their Press "might no longer be stayed but their desire therein furthered," they would in daily prayer commend his Lordship to the "blessed tuition of the Almighty." Burghley, after taking legal advice, then declared the charter to be valid. This privilege seems to have extended to the bookselling trade of the town, for which certain regulations were issued in the same year, including an order that all booksellers and binders should pay Forty Pounds to the University, as well as undertaking to supply only well-bound books at reasonable prices.

Now was Thomas reseated in his office

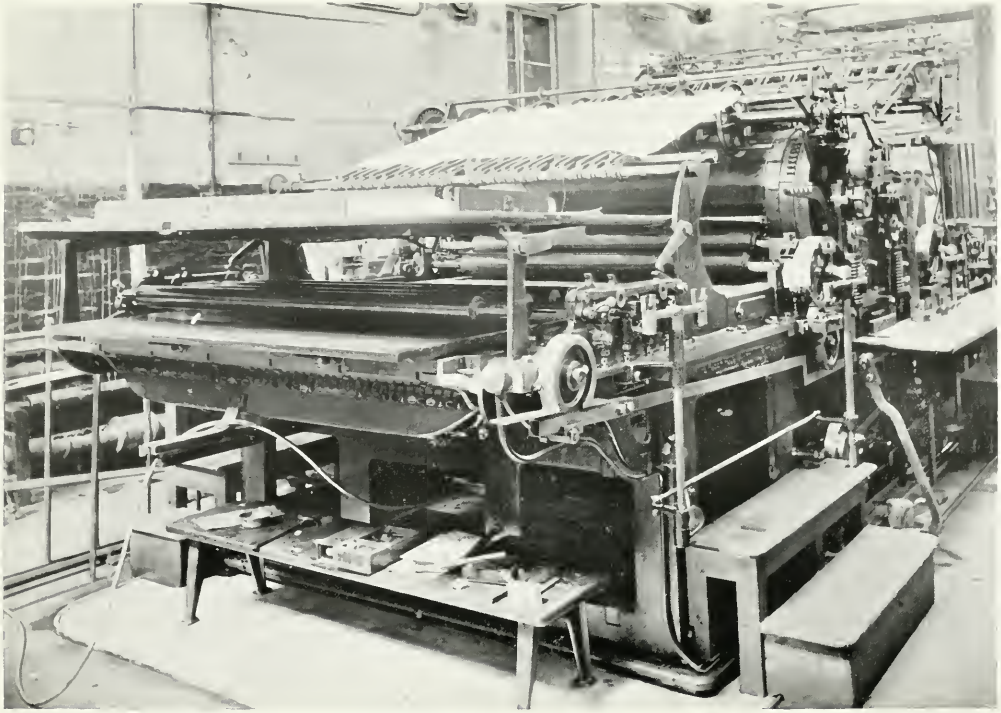
and refurnished with requisites for carrying out his functions. Even then the Press again got into bad odour in high places, by publishing a translation in favour of the Presbyterian form of Church government of the separatist Travers.

> "Ever sen," wrote Archbishop Whitgift, "I hard yt they had a printer at Chambridg, I did greatlie feare this and such-like inconveniencies wold followe. I thinke yt verie convenient that the bokes shold be burned, beeing verie factious and full of unthruthes."

A year or so later, the "rapacious cupidity" of the London printers, in pirating and underselling the productions of the University, in the absence of any law of copyright, caused concerted action to be taken by Cambridge and Oxford to protect



An Ancient Hand Press



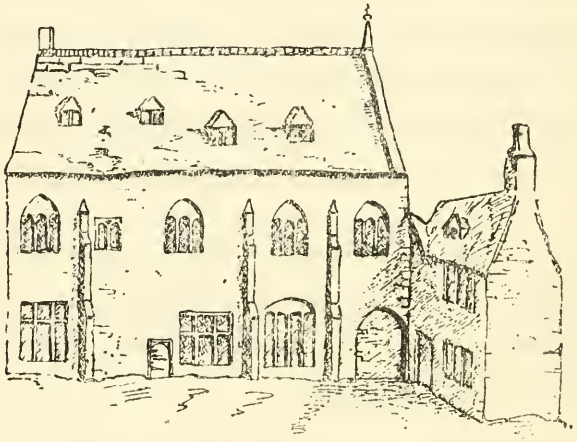
A Modern Printing Machine

their rights, the Cambridge authorities writing once more to Burghley protesting against the "Prynters" who had appropriated the dictionary of Thomas' own compiling, thereby making it a "verie hard matter for oure pore Printer to do anie good by his trade." Yet the jealousies of the Stationers were not yet stifled, for in 1624, Cantrell Legge being University Printer, the Company complained that

> "one legg printed great nombers of psalmes...to the great hindrance of the Companie of Staconers and almost to their vtter vndoing."

The accompanying cut shows the printing house of Mr T. Buck, M.A. in the reign of Charles I, on part of the old site of the Augustinian Friars, behind St Benet's Church. Various enactments were made

about this time to extend or control the privileges of the Press. Thus in 1622 we find an order that any Member of the University should, before printing a composition of his own, first offer the



same to the Press, and that all Members taking a degree should first promise that, should they become schoolmasters, they would not allow any other books for use

in their schools than those printed in the University, so long as such could be obtained at a moderate and fair price. Again, Charles I prohibited the importing and sale of "Latyne Bookes reprinted beyonde Seas havinge byn first printed in Oxford and Cambridge." Issuing this proclamation and another similar cost the town five shillings.

On the other hand, in 1629 the Privy Council made an order that the University might print any number of English Bibles with the Liturgy in the same volume, also of *Lilley's Grammar* three thousand copies a year but no more.

The bitter controversies with outside bodies lasted until the Commonwealth, when the University determined anew to exercise its rights for the free and worthy use of the Press. John Field, a London printer, was elected in 1655 and every

chance of success was given him. A printing house was built in Silver Street, opposite to the present site, which remained in use until the middle of the 19th century. Here the "printing-room was sixty feet by twenty, held six presses, had paper windows and a pleasant garden."

In the days of William III, the energy of Dr Bentley, scholar, critic and Master of Trinity, brought about still greater improvements. Not only were additions made to the buildings, new presses set up, new and beautiful types imported from abroad, but the University took up the policy of producing only such works as appeared to be of permanent value, and also began to accept the financial responsibility and real control of its Press.

Curators were chosen to represent the University, and a Dutch printer, Cornelius

A Reader's Closet

Crownfield, appointed as inspector to conduct their business, his stipend being fixed in 1698 at ten shillings a week.

The outside Presses seem to have become more tolerant of the position of the University by the time of Crownfield's death in 1742, for his successor, J. Bentham, was free of the Stationers' Company and regarded as a printer of repute, "allowed by all Judges to be as great a Proficient in the Mystery as any in England."

About 1760 the University entered into an agreement with the famous John Baskerville, who was desirous of printing a folio Bible and an octavo Prayer-book. In connection with this ambition, he applied to Cambridge and, in spite of some very natural opposition from J. Bentham, then University Printer, the authorities allowed Baskerville to carry out his wish and to

"send to Cambridge 2 presses, workmen & all other requisites, but to take the Chance of the Edition to myself & make the University such Consideration as they should think fit to prescribe."

For the privilege of counting himself as a University Printer, he had to pay such a heavy premium that he derived no pecuniary profit from the appointment.

His first Prayer-book, about the production of which he seems to have taken the greatest pains, appeared in 1760.

"The importance of the work demands all my attention; not only for my own (eternal) reputation, but (I hope) to convince the world, that the University in the honour done me has not intirely misplaced their Favours."

And

> "I procured a sealed Copy of the Common prayer with much trouble & expence from the Cathedral of Litchfield, but found it the most inaccurate & ill-printed work I ever saw: so that I returned it with thanks."

Baskerville's first Prayer-books were all of one size, an imperial octavo. Some were printed on plain paper in Great Primer type and long lines, and others had that border of 'star and oval' ornament so often made use of by Baskerville.

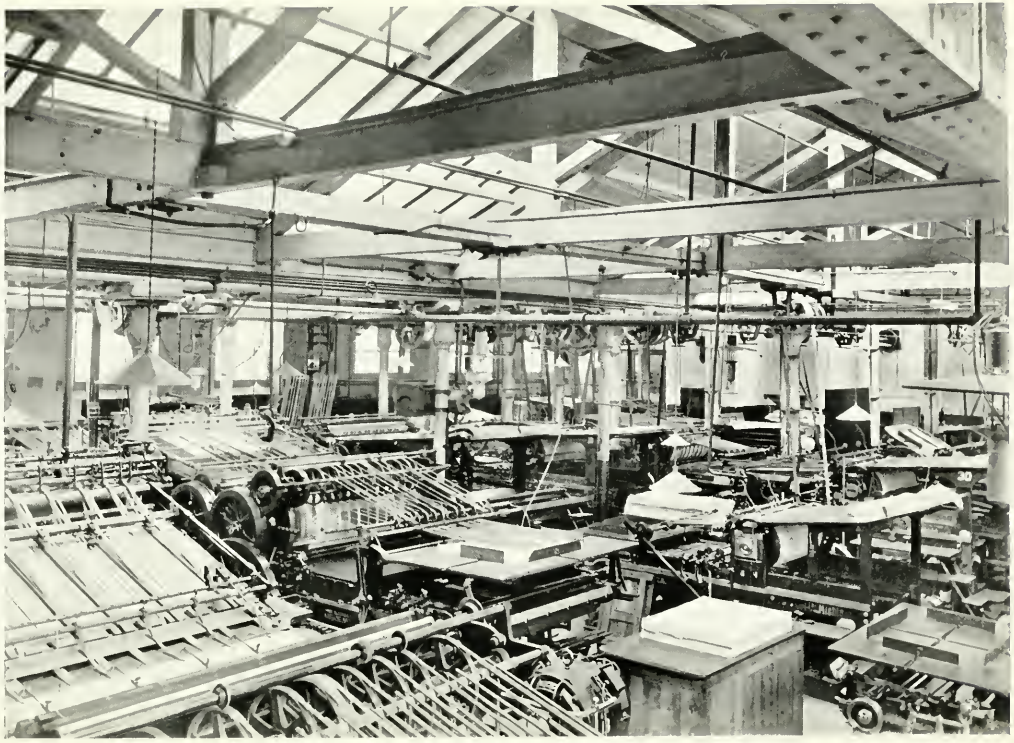
> "The type," he tells us, "is calculated for people who begin to want spectacles but are ashamed to use them at Church."

These books were no doubt finer than any of the kind that had been yet attempted.

But they did not sell readily, and presently Baskerville found it necessary to advance the price from six shillings and sixpence to eight shillings and sixpence, apologising to the public for so doing as he was "greatly out of pocket by the first Impression."

His folio Bible was printed in 1763 but, though a beautiful work, it did not go well and the greater part of the edition was parted with to a London bookseller as a remainder. This failure convinced Baskerville that no good could come from his connection with Cambridge and he therefore broke off his agreement.

In 1804 was purchased the secret of the method of manufacturing stereotyped plates, together with two presses, the invention of Lord Stanhope, which are still in regular use, and in the same year designs were



A View in the Machine Room

made for a new and more commodious printing house.

In 1824 part of the surplus fund for erecting a statue of William Pitt being voted for the building of a new Press, the present site was purchased and the first stone of the new building was laid in 1831; the memory of Pitt being perpetuated in the stone building fronting the street, which, with its imposing array of pinnacles, tower and battlements, has gained from confiding generations the name of the "Freshman's Church."

The new buildings were opened in 1833, on which occasion a University procession, accompanied by a deputation from the Pitt Committee, went from the Senate House to the Press, where the Marquess Camden delivered the key of the building to Dr Webb, Vice-Chancellor. After each

member of the deputation had enjoyed himself by "printing off at the Press a copy of the inscription on the foundation stone, a cold collation was given them by the Press Syndicate."

Behind the Press frontage, which is used partly as an office for the University Registrary, partly as store-room for printed sheets, is a grass-covered square surrounded by offices and work-rooms. On the ground floor of the north side facing on to Silver Street is the large Machine-room. Here are some of the latest machines, including Quad Royal and Quad Demy Perfectors, having two cylinders and printing both sides of the sheet at one time; it is on these machines that most of the Bible work is done. Here also are two revolution presses, single cylinder machines, some of them fitted with paper-feeding attachments

which make the work practically automatic. Among the books being printed in the room at the moment are Bibles of all sizes, from the Imperial Quarto for use in Churches to the smallest known as *Crystal*, Prayer-books, Maps (in some of which as many as twelve different colours are used) and volumes of the *Cambridge Modern History*, the *Cambridge Medieval History*, the *Cambridge History of English Literature*, and of the *Cambridge County Geographies*.

Behind the Machine-room is a blacksmith's shop, where all repairs etc. are done. The power-plant, consisting of two gas engines with their own producers, and two steam engines, all driving dynamos, supplies the motive power and the electric light throughout the establishment.

The Foundry is above the large

Machine-room and comprises a stereotyping department, an electro-moulding room, an electro-battery room and two finishing rooms. They contain some of the most up-to-date plant, including type-casting, bevelling, routing and planing machines.

Next the Foundry come the Store-rooms, where all kinds of types are kept, each separate fount carefully labelled and catalogued. On the same floor is the carpenter's shop, a very necessary adjunct to a large printing house.

There are seven Composing-rooms, some on the first, some on the second floor, where all varieties of languages are set up, including tongues as diverse and complicated as Amharic, Arabic, Hausa and Syriac.

Finally, we come to the Warehouse. Into this department are brought daily from

A Gathering ring in the Warehouse

the adjoining Machine-room the finished signatures, which are counted and stacked until complete copies have been worked off and are ready to send to London for binding. An average of eighteen tons of printed matter leaves the Press each week and a similar amount of white paper comes in.

The type used in this pamphlet was prepared by photographing every letter of the alphabet from a 15th century printed book in the University Library. These photographs were entrusted to a type-designer with instructions to cut a fount of type, following the photos exactly, and only modernising the letters so as to make them uniform in thickness. It will be seen on comparing this type with that of the Kelmscott Press that

there is a considerable similarity between the two faces.

In summing up the past history and the present activities of the Cambridge University Press with

"The instinctive humbleness
Maintained even by the very name and thought
Of printed books and authorship,"

it should be remembered that the general aim has been to give to the world, as well as to preserve for the private peculiar glory of the University, "great and excellent writings," very many of which have proceeded from its own members. This aim, maintained through many vicissitudes and fostered by many privileges, continues unaltered in its mark.

CONCLUSION

Thus fed with learning and nursed by wisdom, Knowledge is carried on from generation to generation by

"Printing, with enlarged command
For thought—dominion vast and absolute
For spreading truth,
Heaven keep us from a lower stage."

Cambridge: Printed at the University Press.

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